

# O

## ODD MAN OUT

the person who is left out; the person who doesn't fit in

1. An uneven number of boys wanted to play the game, so that when both teams had chosen the same number of players, one boy was left standing in the middle. John was the *odd man out*.
2. I felt as though I didn't belong with the group of people at the party. I was *odd man out*.

The expression probably originates from the idea of choosing up two sides for a game in which both teams need an even number of players. If there were an uneven number of people wanting to play, the last (odd) person was left out. The expression has broadened in its meaning to describe anyone who is not included or made to feel part of a group. When the expression is used to describe a woman, the word "man" does not become "woman".

## ODDS AND ENDS

small items that are left over, don't match, or are missing a mate

1. The repair shop is full of *odds and ends* that Mr. Bell collects and keeps just in case he can use them to fix something else.
2. I keep all my *odds and ends* in this drawer, but it's becoming so full of junk that I can't find anything anymore.

## OFF (ONE'S) ROCKER

out of one's mind; slightly crazy

1. Mrs. Crowell is convinced she sees ghosts in the halls, and that they talk to her. I think she's *off her rocker*.
2. You must be *off your rocker* to think that the boss will give you such a big pay raise. He hasn't given anyone else a raise like that.

Compare to: *bats in (one's) belfry; out to lunch; screw loose*

All of these expressions, including *off one's rocker*, are used in a light-hearted, slightly humorous sense.

## OFF THE BEATEN PATH/TRACK

off the road or way that is most often chosen by other people

1. Jennifer likes to take her vacations in the major resorts where everyone goes. She likes the big and noisy crowds instead of places that are *off the beaten track*.
2. Alex has never followed the crowd or done things just to please others. His way in life has been *off the beaten path*.

The expression can be used either literally (as in sentence 1) or figuratively (as in sentence 2).

## OFF THE CUFF

without much advance preparation; spontaneously

1. Holly is a great speaker. Most people like to plan their speeches carefully in advance, but Holly prefers to speak *off the cuff*. Even so, her speeches are always a great success.
2. I can't give you an exact figure for the number of students we have at the university, but *off the cuff* I'd say about 25,000.

Synonym: *off the top of (one's) head*

Compare to: *on the spur of the moment*

*Off the cuff* is usually applied to speaking or writing. *On the spur of the moment* means that one makes a decision to do something suddenly and therefore without much preparation.

## OFF THE TOP OF (ONE'S) HEAD

to say something without much advance preparation

1. Melissa didn't know how many people had called, but guessing *off the top of her head*, she said about a hundred.
2. Richard was unsure what kind of advertising campaign the company wanted, but he made a suggestion *off the top of his head* and they liked it.

Synonym: *off the cuff*

## OFF THE WALL

unusual; peculiar

1. Most of Kevin's suggestions are sound and practical but a few of them are really *off the wall*. I wonder how he comes up with them.
2. Some dress designers today are designing fashionable clothes that are *off the wall*. I prefer classic designs, and I can't imagine wearing some of those bizarre fashions.

Antonym: *run of the mill*

## OLD-BOY NETWORK

the male connections that a man acquires, usually while in college or the military, later used to disseminate jobs and information

1. Mr. Turner got his job through the *old-boy network*, which consisted of the friends he knew when he was at the university.
2. Sometimes it can be very hard to get hired by certain companies because they depend so heavily on hiring through an *old-boy network*. If you aren't a part of it, you don't have a chance.

An *old-boy network* serves as a way to get jobs and spread information, sometimes to the exclusion of others who are outside the network.

## OLD FUDDY-DUDDY

a person who is old-fashioned and not open to new technology or ideas

1. Tom is a bit of an *old fuddy-duddy*. He refuses to get a mobile phone or a computer.
2. My music teacher is pretty cool, but my history teacher is an *old fuddy-duddy*.

Similar to: *stuffed shirt*

Describing someone as an *old fuddy-duddy* is usually seen as harmless and humorous, whereas calling someone a *stuffed shirt* can be rude. The expression can refer to either a woman or a man.

## OLD HAT

routine to the point of boredom (sentence 1); old-fashioned and outmoded (sentence 2)

1. Every New Year's Eve, we go to the same restaurant for dinner and the same hotel for dancing. It's getting to be *old hat* and I'm tired of it. Let's do something different this year.
2. I've heard that idea a thousand times before. It's *old hat*. Can't you think of anything new and different that we could try?

Synonyms: *in a rut*; *on a treadmill*

## ON A/THE WARPATH/RAMPAGE

looking for a fight; very angry and upset with someone or something

1. I decided to get out of the house until my father calms down. He was really *on the warpath* when he saw that I had damaged his new car.
2. The manager is *on a rampage* because he found out that the company management doesn't plan on keeping him when they close his department. He's really angry.

The expression originally referred to American Indians, who were described as *on the warpath* (literally on the way to war) when they were preparing for a fight.

## ON CLOUD NINE

blissfully happy

1. Sharon loved horses, and when she finally took her first riding lesson, she was *on cloud nine*.
2. Seth might be angry if you interrupt his video game—it's new, and he's *on cloud nine*.

Synonym: *seventh heaven*, *in*

## ON HOLD, PUT (SOMETHING)

to postpone something; to wait until later (sentences 1 and 2); to ask somebody to wait without hanging up the telephone (sentence 3)

1. We had planned to start building the new shopping center next month, but the company's profits are down so the project has been *put on hold* for a while.

2. Lorraine was having second thoughts about marrying Phil before both of them finished college. She told him she thought they should put the wedding *on hold* for a few years.

3. I've been trying to call the doctor, but his secretary keeps putting me *on hold*. I don't have time to wait for the doctor to come to the phone, so I guess I'll try to call him again later.

Synonyms: *on the back burner*; *on ice*

*On hold* specifically refers to postponing some action, whereas *put something on ice* means to store or reserve some item for later use. Something that is *on the back burner* has a lower priority or is less important than something else.

## ON ICE, PUT (SOMETHING)

to put something (an excess of some item) in reserve for later use

1. We didn't need all the money we had raised, so we decided to *put some of it on ice* until our funds were low.
2. I'm glad we found enough supplies to do the job, but I wish we had enough to *put some on ice*. We will need some next year too, and we may not be able to find any then.

Synonyms: *salt (something) away*; *save (something) for a rainy day*; *on the back burner*; *on hold*

## ON/OFF A/THE TREADMILL

in a dull and boring routine

1. Mr. Jones goes to work and does the same old job every day, and he never does anything different. He's *on a treadmill*.
2. Everyone thinks I'm so predictable, but some day I'm going to get *off the treadmill* and do something adventurous.
3. They've been *on the treadmill* their whole lives. They would feel very uncomfortable doing anything spontaneous, so it would be impossible for them to get off and do something different.

Synonym: *in a rut*

Compare to: *old hat*

A treadmill is a machine consisting of a continuous belt or moving steps that circle around and around and to which there is no end. The expression is often used to describe one's job or daily life.

## ON (ONE'S) LAST LEGS

about to die, fail, or collapse

1. This car is practically worthless. It's in the repair shop more than it's on the road. I think it's *on its last legs*.
2. The company is selling its assets and is about to declare bankruptcy. It's *on its last legs*.

The expression suggests a person who is about to collapse for the last time because his or her legs no longer have the strength to carry him forward or hold him upright.

## ON THE BACK BURNER, PUT (SOMETHING)

to decrease the amount of energy spent on some activity; to delay or postpone action on some activity

1. The boss isn't sure he wants to pursue that new project right now. I think it's *on the back burner* until the current project is finished.
2. Because of the country's debt problems, the government has had to put its plans to expand the national medical program *on the back burner*.

Compare to: *on hold*; *on ice*

The expression *on the back burner* comes from cooking on a standard stove, which has four burners, two in front and two in back. The burners in front are used for immediate cooking, while the ones in back are often used for simmering or keeping things warm. To move something to the front burner means to make some project highest priority.

## ON THE BALL

mentally sharp or alert; well-prepared; efficient

1. You've been making too many mistakes these days. You'd better get *on the ball* if you want to keep your job.
2. I can't seem to concentrate today. I'm just not *on the ball*.

Antonym: *out to lunch*

## ON THE BLINK

not working correctly

1. We can't watch the football game at my house. My television is *on the blink*.
2. The clock in the office has been *on the blink* for months. I don't think they'll ever get it fixed.

Synonym: *on the fritz*

The expression is usually used with electronic devices. It is not used with more mechanical devices such as cars or other vehicles.

## ON THE FRITZ

not working correctly

1. This television works for a few minutes and then the picture fades out. It's *on the fritz*.
2. We'd better think about getting a new refrigerator, because this one has a puddle of water under it every few days. It seems to be *on the fritz*.

Synonym: *on the blink*

## ON THE GO

constantly busy; very active

1. My neighbor has four young children, and she is always driving them somewhere: to school, to dance lessons, to visit friends, to the doctor's. She's always *on the go*.
2. Some food companies now make ready-to-eat breakfast food for people *on the go*. They can just put the food in the microwave oven or toaster and take it with them in the car.

## ON THE LEVEL

honest and without deception

1. I know you don't believe me, but what I'm telling you is *on the level*.
2. The car dealer offered Robert a chance to buy a fancy car at a big discount. Robert was suspicious because he didn't know if the deal was really *on the level*.

Compare to: *on the up and up*

## ON THE NOSE

exactly

1. Their parents tried not to tell them where they were going, but the children were too clever for them. They guessed it *on the nose*.
2. The children's father told them each to think of a number between one and ten. The child who chose the closest number to the one he was thinking of would get the larger piece of candy. His youngest daughter picked the number *on the nose*.

Compare to: *hit the nail on the head*

## ON THE ROCKS

unstable; likely to collapse. When referring to alcoholic beverages, it means with ice cubes

1. I read in the tabloids that those celebrities' relationship is *on the rocks*. I wonder if it can be saved?
2. Mr. Smith was afraid that after the stormy meeting, his relationship with his client was *on the rocks*. He decided to call his client later in the day and try to straighten things out.
3. When Judy goes to a bar, she always orders a drink *on the rocks*.

The expression is often used to describe a long-term relationship or a marriage (sentence 1), but it can also describe a non-romantic relationship (sentence 2). The expression originates with the image of a ship that has been cast against the rocks and is about to break up. When the expression means "with ice" (as in sentence 3), the ice cubes in the glass are being compared to rocks.

### ON THE SPOT

in an awkward social situation (sentence 1) or immediately and nearby (sentence 2)

1. I'm sorry to ask you these questions without giving you a chance to prepare—I didn't mean to put you *on the spot*.
2. Sherry thought that the doctor would make a future appointment to give her the shot, but he wanted to do it that day. "We can do it here, *on the spot*," he said.

### ON THE TIP OF (ONE'S) TONGUE

almost remembered; about to be said

1. Chris knew the woman, but he couldn't remember her name. It was *on the tip of his tongue*, but it just wouldn't come.
2. Martha was trying to recall the name of the restaurant where they had eaten. It was *on the tip of her tongue* when someone interrupted her thoughts.

The expression is used when one is trying very hard to recall something such as a name, date, word, or fact and feels that he or she is just about to remember it. The expression suggests that the information is so close to being recalled that it is at the front of one's mouth.

### ON THE UP AND UP

honest; ethical; fair

1. The salesman offered us an unbelievable price on computer equipment. Do you think his offer is *on the up and up*?
2. Governor Russell is a very honest politician. He would never do anything that was not *on the up and up*.

Compare to: *on the level*

### ON THE WAGON

to abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages because one cannot control oneself

1. Peter used to drink alcohol to excess, but now he doesn't drink anymore. He's *on the wagon*.
2. I realized I was an alcoholic some years ago. I finally got help and I've been *on the wagon* ever since.

Antonym: *fall off the wagon*

Similar to: *cold turkey*

The expression *on the wagon* usually describes someone who is unable to handle alcohol or who is an alcoholic rather than a person who chooses to abstain for religious or other personal reasons. *On the wagon* refers to alcoholic drinks whereas *cold turkey* refers to abruptly stopping the intake of drugs, cigarettes, and other habits.

### ON THIN ICE, SKATE/TREAD

in an unsafe or risky position

1. Steve is going to run into trouble if he continues to arrive late at work. He's *on thin ice* with the boss already because he spends more time talking on the phone than working.
2. Anita is in serious trouble at the university. Her grades are poor and unless she does well on her final exams, she may be *skating on thin ice*.
3. The children's mother couldn't stand many more of their demands. She told them that they were *treading on thin ice* because they were about to make her lose her temper.

The expression suggests how dangerous it is to tread (walk) or skate on ice that, although frozen, is not thick enough to support one's weight.

### ONCE IN A BLUE MOON

very rarely

1. Jean's parents encouraged her to accept the job with the prestigious company in New York. They told her that a job offer like that comes along only *once in a blue moon*.
2. Roger and Sandy like to stay at home. They rarely travel and they almost never go out to dinner, though they go to the movies *once in a blue moon*.

### ONE FELL SWOOP

one quick, sweeping action

1. The army surrounded the enemy soldiers without their knowledge, and in *one fell swoop* were able to cut them off from their supplies.
2. Dianne swept in with her presentation, and in *one fell swoop* she garnered the support of every member of the board of directors.

### OPEN BOOK

a person who doesn't hide anything about himself or herself; a person's life (sentence 1) or mind in which nothing is hidden

1. Cindy hides nothing about how she spends her time. Her life is an *open book*.
2. James and John are as different as night and day. James is an *open book*, but John is very secretive.

The expression suggests that a person who is an open book is easy to "read" or understand.

## OPEN-MINDED

willing to consider new ideas

1. As a new employee, it's important to be *open-minded* and enthusiastic. You aren't expected to know everything about your job yet, but you should be open to learning new things.
2. Kim is definitely an *open-minded* person. She is very tolerant of different attitudes, cultures, and religions.

Antonym: *closed-minded*

Similar to: *open mind, keep an*

## OPEN MIND, (KEEP) AN

to be willing to listen to and consider all sides of an issue; not to have made up one's mind in advance

1. Julie's father's mind was made up not to let her have her own car. She said that he didn't have an *open mind* about the matter, and that he had not given her a fair chance to persuade him.
2. I have almost decided to vote for the conservative candidate, but I'm still willing to listen to what the other candidates have to say. I'm trying to *keep an open mind* about all the candidates until election day.

Antonym: *closed-minded*

*Open-minded* and *closed-minded* generally refer to a person's overall outlook or approach, whereas *keep an open mind* is used to describe one's approach to one particular situation or topic.

## OUT OF A CLEAR BLUE SKY

without warning

1. Erica didn't expect James to propose marriage so quickly. For her, the proposal came *out of a clear blue sky*.
2. Spencer hadn't sent his resume out, so when somebody called him for a job interview, the offer came *out of a clear blue sky*.

Synonym: *out of the blue*

## OUT OF CIRCULATION

removed from the public; no longer available for use or social interaction

1. This book is no longer available in the library. It's *out of circulation*.
2. Mrs. Winter took her husband's sudden death very hard, and she doesn't have the will to get out and get on with life. She's taken herself *out of circulation*.

The expression is usually used to describe a social situation (sentence 2) but probably originated with printed material (sentence 1).

## OUT OF ONE'S DEPTH/LEAGUE

beyond one's capability

1. I once took part in a chess tournament and got the chance to play a grand master. I lost in just five moves. I was really *out of my league*.
2. After I started my new job, I quickly realized that I was completely *out of my depth*. Nothing I'd learned in school or in my previous jobs had prepared me for the new challenges I had to face.

Synonyms: *bite off more than (one) can chew; in over one's head*

## OUT OF (ONE'S) ELEMENT

in a situation that one is unprepared for or unfamiliar with

1. Bob felt *out of his element* at the crowded party. He does much better with small groups of people.
2. The beginning of a presentation is sometimes difficult. You feel *out of your element* standing in front of an audience. But if you've practiced your talk, it gets easier once you get started.

Synonym: *fish out of water*

Antonym: *in (one's) element*

## OUT OF THE BLUE

suddenly and unexpectedly

1. We were walking down the street when from *out of the blue* an old classmate we hadn't seen for years appeared.
2. Pam was driving down the highway when, *out of the blue*, a truck crossed in front of her and she had to slam on her brakes.

Synonym: *out of a clear blue sky*

## OUT OF THE FRYING PAN AND INTO THE FIRE

from a bad situation to one that is even worse

1. Edith's parents were happy when she broke off her friendship with Ralph, until she started seeing George, who is an even worse influence on her. She's jumped *out of the frying pan into the fire*.
2. Tim didn't like the extra responsibility of being an assistant manager, but now he's decided to accept the position of full manager. He's leaping *out of the frying pan into the fire*.

## OUT OF THE WOODS

out of danger; out of a very difficult situation

1. The doctor told the boy's parents that he was no longer in danger of dying—he had made it through the night and his high fever had returned to normal. He was *out of the woods*.
2. The accountant was trying very hard to find a bank that would loan the company money to stay in business. When he found a bank, the company president was relieved, but the accountant told him the company was *not out of the woods* yet.

3. There was quite a scandal brewing, and it looked like it would cause the downfall of several high-ranking government officials. Fred thought he had avoided being touched by the scandal, but he wouldn't be completely sure for a few weeks. He *wasn't out of the woods* yet.

The expression is often used to describe no longer being in danger of dying (sentence 1). It can also be used to describe situations equally critical, such as the demise of a company (sentence 2) or the death of someone's political life (sentence 3).

### OUT TO LUNCH

absent-minded, unaware or confused (sentence 1); ignorant on some topic (sentence 2); harmlessly crazy or out of touch with reality (sentence 3)

1. I can't believe I was so absent-minded that I erased my entire hard drive! I'm really *out to lunch*.
2. You don't know what you're talking about! You're *out to lunch*.
3. That old soldier is a little *out to lunch*. He wanders around here telling everyone old war stories as though the war was just yesterday.

Antonym: *on the ball*

Compare to: *know if (one) is coming or going* (sentence 1); *know beans about (something)*; *all wet, for the birds* (sentence 2); *bats in (one's) belfry*; *off (one's) rocker*; *screw loose, have a* (sentence 3)

### OVER A BARREL

in a difficult situation or position

1. They agreed on the price of the car with the salesman, but now they can't borrow enough from the bank. They're *over a barrel* because they'll lose their deposit if they can't come up with the rest of the money.
2. If I look for another job, the companies I interview with are going to want to check with my current boss. But I don't want him to know I'm looking for a new job. *I'm over a barrel*.
3. I had to borrow some money from a colleague at work, and now he wants me to help him fix his car on Saturday. I really don't have time to do it, but he's got me *over a barrel* since I owe him a favor.

Similar to: *in a bind*; *in a fix*; *between a rock and a hard place*; *between the devil and the deep blue sea*

### OVER THE HILL

too old to be of much value

1. My dog liked to play when he was young, but now he sleeps all day. He's *over the hill*.
2. Don't you dare tell me I'm *over the hill*. I may be old but I still feel as young as I did thirty years ago.

Synonym: *past (one's) prime*

The expression is used for people and animals, but not for nonliving things.

### OVER THE TOP

beyond expectations; outside normal or accepted boundaries; exaggerated

1. I know my question annoyed him, but his response was *over the top*. He really needs to apologize for his rudeness.
2. Your behavior is sometimes a bit *over the top*. You'll really have to act more appropriately if you ever want to do well in this business.